



United States Senator  
**Richard Shelby**  
REPORTS TO ALABAMA



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**STATES CONTINUE MOVE TOWARD MAKING ENGLISH  
THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF GOVERNMENT**

For many years, I have stressed the importance of English proficiency for new U. S. residents. English is the international language of commerce, and it is a prerequisite for securing even a modest standard of living in this country.

Our nation was founded by immigrants, and the diversity of our population continues to be one of our greatest national assets. However, the English language remains the bond that ties all of these disparate groups together.

Californians recently acknowledged the essential nature of English proficiency in this country by approving Proposition 227, which will effectively eliminate the existing bilingual education programs in that state. Instead of languishing indefinitely in bilingual education classes, children with limited English proficiency will now spend one year in an intensive English immersion program before being integrated into regular classrooms. This initiative received the support of 61 percent of California voters, including a majority in almost every county in that state.

It is also important to note that Proposition 227 appeared to enjoy wide support among California's Hispanic voters at a time when most bilingual education students are Spanish speakers. Proposition 227 will eliminate a roadblock that prevented non-English speaking children from gaining the knowledge needed to embrace future opportunities, and compete with other children. Make no mistake, learning an additional language or even several additional languages is an incredibly valuable asset—especially in an increasingly global

economy. However, our first priority must be to embrace a common, linguistic bond, English, through which we can all communicate.

Last year, I introduced legislation, S. 323, to declare English the official language of the United States government. Under this proposal, all official federal documents and publications would be written in English with exceptions granted for public health and safety, secondary language instruction in schools, diplomatic communication, and some legal actions. Like Proposition 227, this legislation would encourage individuals to learn English as a means of advancement and self-sufficiency.

Many Americans believe that English is already the official language of our nation. Unfortunately, this is not the case. While 23 states, including Alabama, have official English laws, the federal government has yet to adopt a similar statute. From 1995 through 1997, federal agencies (excluding the Departments of State and Defense) published 200 different documents in languages other than English. The publications, printed in languages ranging from Spanish and Russian to Vietnamese and Tagalog, totaled more than 11 million copies.

In 1990, the Census Bureau identified 323 separate and distinct languages which are spoken in the United States. Without an official English declaration, it is conceivable that the federal government could be forced to print documents in each of those 323 languages. Already, some federal agencies have printed such documents as: "Investigation About the Reproductive Be-

havior of Young People in the City of São Paulo" and "Nutritive and Dietetic Guide to Wild Animals in Captivity" in languages other than English—not publications one would consider necessary for the public health and safety of U.S. citizens, or even as essential to the function of our government. At a time when Congress is working to reduce spending and keep the budget in balance, I do not believe that publishing documents (especially those that have little relevancy for the majority of Americans) in different languages is a prudent use of tax dollars.

My legislation represents an attempt to infuse common sense into the current situation. It would not interfere with the use of other languages in private enterprise, nor would it discourage immigrants from speaking in their native languages in the course of their everyday lives. By encouraging non-English speaking residents to acquire English, we are sending a powerful message that mastery of the English language is an important component needed to participate in and assimilate with society. We can only appreciate one another's unique differences if we have the ability to communicate. English establishes the means, enabling that essential communication to occur.

The State of Alabama has already acknowledged the benefits of having an official English law. By following suit, the federal government could not only streamline its operations, but more fully assimilate and integrate non-English speaking citizens into our society.

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**FOR RELEASE UPON RECEIPT: JUNE 11, 1998**



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